

Core Concepts

When Ignorance Governs | Stephen M. Fry

False reality

A set of claims and narratives that remain politically influential even when reliable evidence contradicts them. Ask which claims in the book were tested, by whom, and with what result.

Loyalty test

A demand that a person signal allegiance to a leader or account of events. Ask when such a demand conflicts with professional duties or an institution's independent role.

Institutional guardrails

Checks on power, including courts, congressional oversight, civil service rules, investigative journalism, and elections. Their effectiveness depends on both formal authority and public willingness to accept their legitimacy.

Normalization

The process by which repeated departures from previous standards come to seem routine or unremarkable. Consider what evidence would show a genuine change in the standards expected of officials.

Oversight and accountability

Oversight examines how power is used; accountability applies consequences when rules or obligations are breached. Neither guarantees agreement on policy outcomes.

Questions for readers

Which terms does the book define clearly? Where would you draw a different boundary? What additional evidence would change your view?